Counseling Hispanic Men

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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Men* by Murray Scher, Mark Stevens, Glenn Good, Gregg A. Eichenfield

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When the term *Hispanic* is used, it may refer to any one of more than 20 nationalities that can be categorized as Spanish speaking or Latino. Obviously, the diversity among Hispanics is large, and national origin plays a key role in the socialization process. For the purpose of this chapter, we will concentrate on three primary Hispanic groups: Cubans, Mexican-Americans (Chicanos), and Puerto Ricans. Our clinical experience is based primarily on Hispanic college and graduate students. Thus some of the observations will be influenced by work in university settings.

This chapter will highlight major constructs and concepts that are most salient in counseling any Hispanic male regardless of specific nationality or social standing. Chief among these are the concepts of acculturation, ethnic identity development, and machismo. These will be discussed as a backdrop to the presentation of several individual and group therapy cases that illustrate the issues in action. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of specific differences across the three primary groups that are important in the counseling process.

Acculturation

In the social science literature, the attention placed on the construct of acculturation has dramatically increased in the last decade (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Olmedo, 1979; Padilla, 1980). Implications for counseling and therapy have also been explored. It is becoming clear that the construct of acculturation has direct and significant implications for the provision of effective psychotherapy when working with the Hispanic male client.

In particular, it should be noted that acculturation in reference to the mainstream Anglo-American society has been identified as a moderator variable in a number of important processes. These processes include client dropout rate (Miranda, Andujo, Caballero, Guerrero, & Ramos, 1976), self-disclosure

(Castro, 1977), willingness to seek professional help (Ruiz, Casas, & Padilla, 1979), success in psychotherapy (Miranda & Castro, 1977), problems with adjustment and psychopathology (Szapocznik, Scopetta, & Tillman, 1979; Torres-Matrullo, 1976), and preference for an ethnically similar counselor (Sanchez & Atkinson, 1983).

Given the significance of acculturation, it is important to assess and incorporate it into work with male Hispanics. Before expanding on the implications of acculturation for working with Hispanic males, a definition will be provided.

Acculturation is conceptualized as a multidimensional and multidirectional process whereby Hispanics absorb, learn, acquire, and integrate the overt and covert cultural characteristics of the host culture. In other words, acculturation as a process comprises the integration of affective, cognitive, and behavioral cultural traits of the predominant culture (Mendoza & Martinez, 1980).

The overt cultural characteristics of dress, language usage, eating habits, and entertainment are more easily incorporated into a new set of functional traits. The covert and more subtle traits pertaining to attitudes, values, beliefs, and affective reactions take longer to acquire. Also, acculturation occurs at a different rate and depth for each individual, depending on a variety of factors including acceptance by the host culture and the motivation of the new immigrant in becoming an accepted and active participant in the host society. Note that the integration of cognitive, behavioral, and affective components will vary for each individual.

The above description of acculturation may sound intricate; it is a complex process that demands such a description. When working with Hispanic males it may be quite informative to assess the extent and depth of acculturation, especially if the presenting problem involves issues of identity, values dissonance or clarification, conflict with generations, adjusting or making it in the dominant culture, and other related concerns.

This recommendation directly challenges previous depictions of the Hispanic people. For a number of decades in the social science literature, before the civil rights movements, a conceptual error was made in depicting all Hispanics as a homogeneous group. Regardless of such obvious differences as national origin, Spanish language variations, and specific cultural traditions, Hispanics were considered one and

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the same. That is, differences between the various Hispanics groups were not acknowledged, and variations within each Hispanic group were not even considered.

While the Spanish language may be a common characteristic for the various Hispanic groups, differences exist in terms of dress, foods, language variation, physical traits, values, rituals, religion, and beliefs. The same differences exist in the within-group variation found for each Hispanic group.

As an example of this diversity, differences exist in the labels used by the individuals with a common Mexican ancestry. The various terms that have been used include Spanish American, Hispanic, Latino, Spanish, Raza, Mexican-American, Mexican American (without hyphen), Chicano, and Tex-Mex. Many individuals who identify with the term of *Chicano* are offended when they are assumed to be Mexican-American and vice versa. In many parts of the country the term *Chicano* is not accepted by more traditional Mexican-Americans, while some Anglo-Americans may not have even heard of the term.

In establishing a therapeutic relationship, the therapist would be wise to refrain from labeling the Hispanic client with any of the above labels or any other self-identifying label applicable to the various Hispanic groups. A wise strategy to use would be to ask the Hispanic male client what label, if any, he uses to identify himself.

Via the process of acculturation a major step is taken in acknowledging differences among Hispanics on a number of clinically significant areas. In working with Hispanic males, we suggest that therapists assess the acculturation level of their male clients and incorporate this information into their therapeutic interventions. Specifically, it is important to assess the uniqueness of each Hispanic male along such dimensions as degree of cultural commitment and preference for Hispanic culture versus the Anglo-American culture, language usage, generational level, racial/ethnic group and attitudes toward their own Hispanic group. Most of these dimensions have been incorporated into quantitative measures of acculturation that can help account for the client's degree of acculturation.

Some of these acculturation measurement tools include a Measure of Acculturation for Chicano Adolescents (Olmeda, Martinez, & Martinez, 1978), the Behavioral Acculturation Scale (Szapocznik, Scoppeta, & Tillman, 1979), the inclusive Model of Acculturation (Mendoza & Martinez, 1981), the Bilingualism/ Multiculturalism Experience Inventory (Ramirez, 1983), and the Acculturation Rating

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Scale for Mexican-Americans (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). These scales provide viable alternatives and diminish the guesswork in trying to understand (1) the intragroup diversity found among the various Hispanic groups, (2) the diversity found within each Hispanic group, and (3) the uniqueness of each Hispanic client.

With this information, not only could therapists come to terms with the individuality of the Hispanic client, but they could avoid stereotypes, assumptions, and presuppositions about Hispanic males. Also, this information is invaluable in working with issues pertaining to their bilingual bicultural existence, such as conflicts germane to generational differences and stress associated with adapting to the dominant culture.

Specifically, the client's uniqueness may be captured in terms of how he identifies himself, language familiarity and usage, parents' background, generational level, socioeconomic level, educational level, race and ethnicity of friends, degree of extended family, social functioning in two or more cultures, and degree of cultural commitment to each culture.

During the initial counseling sessions the therapist may formally assess the degree of acculturation by asking the client to complete one of the acculturation questionnaires. Informally, the therapist could simply ask the client questions that would generate the same information generated by the acculturation measurements.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Development

For Hispanic males, the process of coming to terms with their racial/ethnic minority identity is another central process with significant clinical implications. This process refers to the painstaking task Hispanics experience in understanding themselves and their specific Hispanic cultural background in the context of a culturally dominant and oppressive society.

Our personal struggles in embracing an identity and our clinical work with Hispanic males indicate that much diversity exists in terms of how Hispanics identify themselves. This diversity may be best conceptualized through a continuum, one end of which is rejection of Hispanic background and total immersion into the Anglo-American culture; at the other end is rejection of the Anglo-American culture

and complete embracing of Hispanic culture.

A model developed by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979) may help therapists understand this diversity along with inherent cognitive, behavioral, and affective changes. The model (see Figure 14.1) defines five stages of development that oppressed people may experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own minority culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures (Atkinson et al., 1979, p. 35).

The behaviors, cognitions, and affective reactions of Hispanic males may be a function of their degree of acculturation as well as their placement in the Minority Identity Development Model. An assessment of the Hispanic client's racial/ethnic minority identity stage may answer a number of clinically important questions such as the following: To what extent is the client accepting of and comfortable with his ethnicity? Is the client proud, ambivalent, or ashamed of his parents and his background? Is the client alienated from himself and his culture? How comfortable is the client with himself, members of his own cultural background, members of other minority groups, and members of the dominant group? Given a particular stage of identity development, what is the client's self-esteem and self-image?

Stages of Minority Development Model	Attitude toward self	Attitude toward others of same minority	Attitude toward others of different minority	Attitude toward dominant group
Stage 1- Conformity	Self-Depreciating	Group-Depreciating	Discriminatory	Group-Appreciating
Stage 2- Dissonance	Conflict between self-depreciating and appreciating	Conflict between group depreciating and group-appreciating	Conflict between dominant held views of minority hierarchy and feelings of shared experience	Conflict between group-appreciating and group-depreciating
Stage 3- Resistance and Immersion	Self-Appreciating	Group-Appreciating	Conflict between feelings of empathy for other minority experiences of culture-centrism	Group-Depreciating
Stage 4- Introspection	Concern with basis of self-appreciation	Concern with nature of equivocal appreciation	Concern with ethnocentric basis for judging others	Concern with the basis of group depreciation
Stage 5- Synergetic Articulation and awareness	Self-Appreciating	Group-Appreciating	Group-Appreciating	Selective Appreciation

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SOURCE: Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, *Counseling American Minorities: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (2nd ed.), 1979, 1983, Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Figure 14.1 Summary of Minority Identity Development Model

As the reader may have deduced, each stage of minority identity development has implications for conducting counseling and therapy with Hispanic males. Due to space limitations, the reader is referred to Atkinson et al. (1979) where the implications for each stage are discussed.

Differences Across Hispanic Groups

As mentioned in the introduction, nationality has a profound influence on the socialization process of human beings. Hispanic populations represent tremendous diversity in nationality since there are more than 20 countries that can be considered Hispanic. The three major Latino groups in this country are Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans. Each group has its unique history, which has implications for counseling.

Cubans as a group reflect a distinct migratory history when compared to other Hispanic groups. Three phases of migration have been identified (Bernal, 1982). The first phase, from 1959-1965, had two waves. The first wave, from 1959 to 1961, was composed of persons from the upper and upper-middle classes who had hopes of returning when the political climate had improved. The second wave comprised people from the middle class and professional sector who could not accept the Castro revolution.

The second phase, beginning in 1965 and ending in 1973, included mostly middle- and lower middle-class Cubans such as small business owners and skilled laborers. These first two phases of immigrants were not characteristic of Cuba in general since they were largely white, older, and a majority were female.

The third and most recent phase is predominantly non-white, young (15-35 years of age), and male, and included poorly educated, antisocial elements of Cuban society, along with some political prisoners.

These waves of immigration suggest that it is vital for the counselor to ascertain the migratory

history of a Cuban client. Class, racial, and political factors are closely linked to various migratory phases and these can provide a useful backdrop against which to assess a client's presenting concerns.

Puerto Ricans have less discernible movements through history; but a clear link between the island of Puerto Rico and the mainland exists since Puerto Ricans have U.S. citizenship and can thus travel freely (Garcia-Preto, 1982). Just as many Cubans are concerned with the political future of their country, Puerto Ricans often focus their political energies around the question of statehood versus independence for their island. Nationalism is thus a key ingredient in the lives of many Cubans and Puerto Ricans, though the degree will depend on acculturation and ethnic identity factors as outlined in previous sections.

Mexican-Americans (Chicanos) as a group appear to have minimal involvement with the political future of Mexico. This is perhaps due to the fact that Mexico has a history of being a relatively stable, democratic country, though its economic condition at present threatens to undermine that stability. Chicanos, too, have a long history of being woven into the fabric of American society since many of the southwestern states were originally Mexican territories and populated by Mexican settlers.

Because of this long history, it is probably fair to say that variations in acculturation are most numerous for Chicanos because several generations are represented across the history of this country. Cubans and Puerto Ricans have a shorter history of migration so that variation in acculturation is smaller in comparison to Chicanos. Nonetheless, family generational level and migratory status are key factors to assess early on in counseling for all three Hispanic groups.

A final important factor concerns variation in racial characteristics. Hispanics represent a mixture of several racial groupings. Some families trace their bloodlines directly back to Spain and consequently retain Caucasian features. Other families share multiple bloodlines comprising Native-American, African, and Caucasian races. The African influence is especially strong in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Being a "visible" ethnic minority group member because of physical features often plays a critical role in the emotional life of Hispanics. The degree to which a Hispanic has experienced prejudice and discrimination is related to such "visibility" and this must be calculated into any counseling relationship.

Machismo

No other concept is more closely associated with Hispanic men than is *machismo.* Unfortunately, this term has become quite pejorative in its English usage, whereas in Spanish the word has many positive connotations. Non-Hispanic people have taken the term to mean the equivalent of male chauvinism, exaggerated "hyper-masculinity." As such, machismo embodies brutal, sexist behaviors. The use and meaning of this term among Spanish-speaking peoples is quite different. In a Hispanic context, machismo is closely aligned with the concept of chivalry. The definition of chivalrous behavior includes being gallant, courteous, generous, charitable, and courageous. When a Hispanic male is labeled as *un macho* (a macho man), he is seen as a knight in the best sense of that term.

As Ruiz (1981, pp. 191-192) states:

> It [machismo] connotes physical strength, sexual attractiveness, virtue, and potency. In this sense, the label "macho" has many of the same connotations it has in English.... At a more subtle level of analysis, "real" masculinity among Hispanics involves dignity in personal conduct, respect for others, love for the family, and affection for children. When applied by non-Hispanics to Hispanic males, however, "macho" often is defined in terms of physical aggression, sexual promiscuity, dominance of women, and excessive use of alcohol. In reaction to this abuse, Hispanic women are assumed to be submissive, nurturant, and virtuous thereby maintaining the unity of the Hispanic family despite all the disruption from their fathers, husbands, and sons.

What has happened over the years is that English has usurped the word and reworked the definition, turning it into the functional equivalent of male chauvinism. The sociological and psychological impact of this has been to stereotype unfairly Hispanic men as being exaggeratedly masculine in their behavior. While there is no doubt that chauvinism and sexism occur among Hispanic men, we doubt that they exist to a greater degree than in other groups. Machismo has become an unhealthy characteristic attributed to Hispanic men due largely to linguistic dynamics rather than to reality itself. Taking a Spanish-language term and reworking the meaning in English has served to promote prejudice toward the male members of Latino societies.

Once again, there is no doubt that sexism and chauvinism exist among Hispanics, but these are not the same thing as machismo in the Latino context. Because machismo, as defined in Spanish, is a prized characteristic, some social scientists have asserted that Hispanics condone alcoholism and wife abuse. This shocking conclusion is arrived at because machismo is redefined by these writers as equivalent to chauvinism in English. This is a translational issue that has had serious sociopsychological consequences.

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Machismo should not be used to denote sexism or chauvinism so that its positive definition might be asserted and enhanced. Furthermore, it is important to recognize from a counseling standpoint that the use of the word may unduly influence the counselor to expect chauvinistic behavior in Hispanic males. Assuming a highly sexist orientation on the part of Hispanic male clients is both hazardous and unfair until a full assessment is made.

Sexism and chauvinism, especially in their most abusive forms, are not condoned by Hispanic populations, though the level of tolerance for such may be problematic in some families. In summary, the word *machismo* should not be used when chauvinism or sexism is what is being denoted. And when entering a counseling relationship with a Hispanic male, presumptions about his sexism should not be made. Rather careful assessment is necessary since Hispanic men, like all men, have varying degrees of chauvinistic attitudes and behaviors.

Individual Counseling Case

In this section a brief description of an individual counseling case that highlights some key dynamics will be presented. An extensive analysis of a counseling group for Hispanic men will then be outlined illustrating unique group processes and issues. A brief commentary on Hispanic clients in culturally mixed groups is also included.

Shortly after one of the authors began his career as a psychotherapist, a Chicano first-year graduate student was referred to him for counseling regarding depression and anxiety. This was the first Chicano referred to the therapist, so excitement ran high in anticipation of finally being able to work with a fellow Hispanic. The student appeared to have many misgivings about being in graduate school; and though his anxieties seemed understandable, they were heightened by the fact that he did not feel *entitled* to be at a university. This feeling persisted despite his graduation from college with a bachelor's degree. He minimized this accomplishment by belittling the college that granted his degree. Thus he also belittled his efforts as well.

The key dynamic that emerged early on was the issue of *entitlement.* As a low-income Chicano, he had grown up believing that a blue-collar job was his lot in life and that to strive for anything higher was

contrary to his upbringing. He was therefore very ill at ease in graduate school since the environment was “too high class” for his background as he saw it.

Feeling and believing that one is entitled to the various possibilities that life offers is a key concern for many minorities who have experienced oppression. Hispanic men who strive for achievement in various forms often must confront strong beliefs about the possibilities that are “legitimate” for them to pursue.

This counseling case illustrated in a very clear way early on how a person can become limited by perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about the options in life. The concept of entitlement is an important focus in many counseling situations and is particularly salient for ethnic minority group members and other oppressed peoples.

The case also illustrated a second key dynamic, which emerged after the fifth session. As that meeting was drawing to a close, the student indicated he had a major disclosure to make. With tears welling up in his eyes, he admitted that when he had heard he was being referred to a Chicano psychologist he thought the agency was discriminating against him by referring him to “second-class treatment.” He could not conceive of such a thing as a Chicano psychologist. And if such a person existed, he (or she) could not be very competent!

All along the therapist had assumed that rapport and trust had been building, and clearly this profound disclosure indicated the client was trusting enough to risk it. Obviously, however, early on the client had serious misgivings that had not come to the therapist’s attention.

This incident illustrates the need to be attentive to the prejudices that ethnic minorities incorporate about their own group members. Believing that a professional of your own group could not be competent is an excellent example of prejudice turned inward against one’s fellow members. Such toxic effects of discrimination may slowly dissipate as more role models of successful, reputable Hispanics develop across all professional occupations.

The counselor, however, must be sensitive to the client’s own ethnic identity development as discussed earlier in this chapter. Variations in ethnic pride and acceptance have serious consequences

for counseling dynamics, as this case illustrates. With increasing pride and self-acceptance, issues of entitlement begin to be resolved. Also, negative beliefs about one's ethnic group are also transformed into positive assertions, which help the client gain greater self-efficacy.

Group Counseling

Group psychotherapy has been supported as an appropriate treatment modality for Hispanic individuals by a number of writers in the mental health field (Boulette, 1975; Padilla, Ruiz, & Alvarez, 1975). The rationale for referral to group psychotherapy as treatment of choice has been well documented (Rutan & Stone, 1984; Yalom, 1970). At this point in our discussion, we would like to focus on the particular issues likely to be encountered by group leaders in a group targeted for Hispanic men. The issues discussed here were encountered in a group that two of the authors led at a university counseling center. Care should be taken by the reader not to generalize unduly from this setting.

BEGINNING THE GROUP

It has been suggested that psychotherapeutic treatment for Hispanic clients should be particularly focused on behavioral, goal-oriented, prescriptive, and structured activities and interventions (Herrera & Sanchez, 1980; Valdes, 1984). Early group activity revolves around the process of using the presenting problems that the individual group members bring to the group to identify and clarify realistic, specific, concrete, workable goals. This process allows group members to develop criteria to monitor their progress and ultimately to determine their readiness to end their involvement in the group.

Group members and leaders spend much time negotiating the group goals as well. Early sessions involve decisions about whether the group would be a "rap group," a political action group, a support group, or a psychotherapy/counseling group. The underlying issue seems to be that how the group was defined had some implications for each individual in the group. It can be quite difficult for a majority of the group members to verbally admit that they need help or "have a problem," though ostensibly their attendance is an obvious indicator that there is a concern. Defining the group as a rap group, political action group, or, to some extent, a support group seems to be less threatening to some of the group members.

Another issue that develops early is commitment to the group. Group members discuss sporadic attendance ("I won't be able to make it to the group all the time"; "Can we come and go as we please?"; "Do we have to be here every week?"), lateness, and how to deal with this issue with other group members. The group members tend to be extremely formal and polite with each other, hesitating to deal directly with each other or confront each other concerning their group behavior. This can continue to be a central theme throughout the duration of the group.

Perhaps the most striking issue that emerges in the initial stage of the group process involves the question, "Quien es el mas Mexicano?" or "Who is the most Mexican in the group?" Group members explore this question by focusing on such topics as each individual's level of fluency in the Spanish language, skin color or pigmentation, and the implications and origins of their given name, surname, and nicknames. These questions and subsequent answers seem to determine a certain hierarchy and dimensionality within the group with regard to just how Mexican each group member is. Group leaders can discuss the implications of this hierarchical structure and often it is revealed that it denotes some rank ordering of entitlement to be in the group.

Some other issues that emerge in the initial stage of the group process involve relationships outside the group: dating behavior with both Hispanic women and non-Hispanic women, friendships with other males, feelings of disappointment and inadequacy in relationships, and how each of those issues contributes to their presenting problem and how each of those issues is being played out in the group.

MIDDLE STAGE OF THE GROUP PROCESS

As the group develops some cohesion and individuals begin to trust and learn skills in self-disclosure, the group process can begin to move in some quite healthy directions. The group often displays some of the typical characteristics that most psychotherapy groups have in common. In addition, however, groups of Hispanic males take on a very uniquely interesting flavor. The members struggle with what could be described as a lack of knowledge and sophistication of the counseling process: how to use the group and leaders for support, how to interact with others using a full range of intrapersonal skills, how to self-disclose, how to listen, how to confront and challenge each other. Though the group leaders meet each individual in the group during a pre-group interview, it becomes obvious during each session

that group leaders should take much time before the group meets to educate each individual member about how to be good group members through a “role induction”-type intervention (Hoehn-Saric et al. 1964). This seems particularly important when dealing with a special population group that may not have much familiarity with the counseling process.

At this middle stage of the group process, it appears that the group begins to focus on external factors that they feel are impinging on their lives. The group often spends a significant time bad-mouthing the majority culture, scapegoating “gringos,” expressing feelings of powerlessness within the system, and expressing at least indirectly some self-hatred. This self-hatred manifests itself in statements about an inability to identify with, relate to, or appreciate certain aspects of the Hispanic culture, a lack of pride or respect for their ethnic origins or background, and expressing embarrassment about one’s family behavior or traditions.

TERMINATION

Several noteworthy developments occur during the final stage of the group process. In addition to the typical termination issues, such as summary of progress and assessment of the attainment of individual and group goals, future goals, and plan of action beyond therapy, the group members focus on the task of brainstorming ways of networking with other Hispanics in the college milieu, ideas for the next group, and ways to recruit new members. There is much planning about how to use other resources, particularly other counseling resources such as individual therapy, coed psychotherapy groups, specific skill or theme groups, and other support groups. Finally, the group members express feelings of sadness, fear, and disappointment about the termination of the group. Saying goodbye is difficult, particularly for members who had reported a lack of significant, meaningful familial or peer relationships in the past. The group members also often make arrangements to meet in various subgroups and dyads to follow up and support their growth and progress in the group.

Hispanic Men in Heterogeneous Psychotherapy Groups

Hispanic men involved in ethnically heterogeneous psychotherapy groups display some unique characteristics during the course of therapy. In addition to the ambivalent feelings about being in

therapy, the difficulty experienced during attempts to self-disclose, and the limited awareness of emotions and feelings that a majority of men in groups exhibit, the Hispanic male often finds himself feeling alienated from the group and having difficulty trusting the other members and the group leaders. Talking about these feelings can often be threatening, especially if the Hispanic male has had little or no previous experience in a group of predominantly non-Hispanic individuals.

Another issue that comes to the forefront of awareness for Hispanic males is the initial denial or ignorance of minority/ ethnic membership as a relevant factor in the dynamics of the group. Inevitably, the group members begin to realize that for many individual reasons the group has been and is being affected by the presence of a minority group member and that many of the interactions and disclosures that have taken place have been altered by the internal dialogue and particular stereotypes that each of the group members has carried into the group. Discussion about internal dialogue and preconceived notions, by both the non-Hispanic and Hispanic group members, can be fruitful material to use in the group therapy process. Often, all the group members' feelings of alienation, highlighted by ethnic minority group members, become clear for all group members, allowing feelings of closeness and trust to emerge. There is often a decrease of emotional distance and an increase in cohesion when real feelings about race, culture, and ethnicity are disclosed.

Summary

The concepts presented at the beginning of the chapter—acculturation, ethnic identity development, machismo, and nationality—are central to the assessment and counseling of Hispanic men as well as ethnic minorities in general. These concepts are enormous in scope yet they profoundly affect the being of each client.

Counselors working with Hispanic clients are challenged to be knowledgeable about the diversity of Latino cultures. No counselor, however adept, can have a mastery of such knowledge. What is required is an openness to continual learning and exploring. In this regard, it might well be said that culturally sensitive counseling is not so much a set of specialized knowledge and skills as it is a combination of awareness and attitude.

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